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Gordon, Davis, USDA honor Twin Lakes Telephone Coop for 60 years of innovative partnership

GAINESBORO, Tenn., Nov. 25, 2009 — U.S. Rep. Bart Gordon, U.S. Rep. Lincoln Davis and USDA Rural Development State Director Bobby Goode honored Twin Lakes Telephone Cooperative as one of the first and most productive member-owned rural telephone service providers in the nation. The presentation was part of the 60th anniversary celebration of the USDA Rural Telecommunications Program.

Back in 1949 only about one in three farmers had access to a home telephone. In Tennessee's sparsely populated Upper Cumberland Plateau the number was even lower.

When Congress established the Rural Utility Service (RUS) that year a handful of residents in the Jackson County seat of Gainesboro seized the opportunity to overcome the mountainous region's geographic isolation. Marketing at county fairs, community meetings and even on the corner of the courthouse square paid off. Friends and businesses signed up for service by buying a membership in the venture for \$25 and Twin Lakes Telephone Cooperative (TLTC) was born.

"Those first leaders acted on a vision that has made it possible for farms and businesses to prosper, and families and friends to have peace of mind that they were not alone in an emergency," said U.S. Rep. Bart Gordon at an event Tuesday celebrating 60 years of partnership between TLTC and RUS.

By 1951, with start-up funding from members and financing from a fledgling RUS, TLTC began raising telephone poles and stringing copper wire down dirt roads. What started with basic operator-assisted eight-party line connections now provides 15 exchanges with all digital switches and the full range of modern telecommunications options including broadband.

"With fiber to the home being installed in Fentress County, Twin Lakes is again opening up new frontiers for rural businesses and creating educational and health care opportunities that were unimaginable not that long ago," said U.S. Rep. Lincoln Davis, a lifelong TLTC member from Fentress County.

Today the cooperative has grown to be one of the largest member-owned providers in the nation. TLCC employees 118 people working out of six offices to serve 34,145 customers in six counties including Clay, Fentress, Jackson, Overton, Pickett and Putnam Counties.

TLTC President J. David Parsons said, "The exceptional local network we enjoy as customer-owners gives us a sense that not only is the network ours, but that it was built uniquely to serve schools, businesses and homes where we've invested our lives."

"Technology provides powerful tools that can erase geographical boundaries and provide new opportunities wherever we live or work. But it's people who determine how those tools will be used," concluded Gordon.

Rural Development's telecommunications programs provide financing to rural utilities, municipalities, public utility districts, corporations, and cooperative and other non-profit associations. Loan funds may be used to finance telecommunication services in rural areas for new construction, improvements, expansions, acquisitions or refinancing.

Others participating in the event included USDA Deputy Administrator Jessica Zufolo, Telecom Program Field Representative Terry Kokinda, TLTC board members, mayors from the six county service area and RD Acting Area Director Jerry Jolley.

USDA Rural Development invests in jobs, businesses, community infrastructure, homeownership and affordable rental housing in rural communities. Last year Rural Development assisted more than 866,000 Tennessee families and businesses with more than \$619 million in financial assistance through affordable loans, loan guarantees and grants.

For more information on Rural Development programs contact the Rural Development Area Office in Cookeville at 931-528-6539 ext. 2, toll free at 1-800-342-3149 extension 1493, or visit us online at www.rurdev.usda.gov/tn.

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